
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	421 T Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	LeDroit Park Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
		<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date:	June 25, 2020	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	20-300	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner Vitis Investments LLC, seeks subdivision and concept review to combine three lots into one lot and add a three-story rear addition to 421 T Street NW, a freestanding three-story house which contributes to the LeDroit Park Historic District. Plans were prepared by Square 134 Architects.

Property Description and Context

The house is one of the original houses in the LeDroit Park subdivision, built in 1876 by architect James H. McGill. It exhibits a high degree of integrity—except for its missing front porch—and shares many characteristics with the other McGill houses of the historic district. The brick house has an asymmetrical cross-axial form capped by a complex roof encompassing the third floor. The front façade is dominated by the face of the slender axis which has a board-and-batten room nested on top of a brick bay. Set back from that is the wide cross-axis which is nearly square in proportion. Like the front façade, the west elevation of the wide axis displays a board-and-batten and brick bay composition. The narrow axis has a tall gable roof which crosses with the mansard roof of the wide axis. All four sides of the slate roof are articulated by a variety of different dormers, balconies and chimneys. The brick two-story rear wing extending off the back of the house has a simple gable roof and terminates with an ornate chimney. A non-original one-story addition is attached to the west side of the rear wing.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to combine two small lots with the house lot and build a three-story addition at the end of the rear wing. The rear wing and its retained chimney would be repurposed as a hyphen between the existing house and the addition with the non-original one-story rear addition being replaced with a glazed corridor. The depth of the addition would be 30 feet and its width and eave height would match those of the house. A low slope gable roof encompassing the third floor would peak at a lower height than the original house. Walls would be two patterns of brick and the roof would be metal. A pair of large shed dormers would cap the addition's west elevation and a pair of projections would hang off the east and north elevations. The north elevation reveals that the two halves of the gable roof would not meet at a peak but be held apart by a channel of flat roof.

Evaluation

The concept design establishes that 421 T Street has room to compatibly receive a sizable rear addition but also shows that further design work is necessary to determine the precise size and composition of that rear addition.

The subdivision would be compatible with the pattern of development of McGill houses. One of the lots (Lot 805) was once part of the house lot. The other lot (Lot 807) would move a small amount of land from a U Street property to the project lot. This exact sort of lot alteration was a not uncommon rearrangement of land by original owners (Figure 1). No structure is proposed for the land gained by the subdivision but it would be used as surface parking.

Siting the addition at the end of the rear wing provides a comfortable separation between old and new. Viewed from the intersection of 5th and T streets through the open corner lot the old and new would have a balanced relationship helped by the length of the hyphen and the alignment of the eave heights of the two building masses. Repurposing the rear wing as a hyphen also avoids unnecessary demolition and the complicated question of how to attach an addition to a historic roof which is significant on all four sides. Intersecting with the existing eaves and dormers is a design and preservation challenge best avoided.

The dimensions of the addition achieve a massing generally proportional to the house. McGill's arrangement of two axes under a complex roof scape achieves a cube-like massing which is then articulated by a number of different architectural components. These board-and-batten bays, dormers and a balcony add variety to the building mass, but are scaled to fit their particular part of the building. Duplicating this relationship of building mass to components in the rear addition is a sympathetic approach but the components presented in this concept are over-sized and grouped too close together. This gives an effect of crowded complexity out of scale with the overall massing of the building. The addition appears to be all components and no building.

That is not to say the components should be removed completely. They play an important role in modulating and giving relief to what would otherwise be a stark addition to a playful historic house. Rather, the components should be carefully reduced in size and quantity to better match the scale and character of the McGill house.

The clearest example of this is illustrated on sheet SD1.14 which shows the west elevation of the project. In this view the shed-roof dormers of the addition are barely separated and occupy most of the roof. The low slope of the roof only adds to the effect because the gable roof form disappears under the weight of the dormers. If the bays and dormers of the McGill house occupy a spotlight on a large stage, the dormers and bays of the addition are floodlight and no stage. Similar analysis of the east and north elevations ends in the same recommendation that the bay and dormer components need to be resized to fit the mass of the addition.

The complexity of the attached components also augments the prominence of the addition as viewed down the length of the east-west alley outletting at 4th Street and also from U Street looking through the houses at 410 and 412. The latter is the more important consideration because these McGill houses are unattached duplexes and the long view between houses is an important measure in the rhythm of the streetscape. The north elevation of the rear addition at 421 T Street should convincingly restrict itself to a modesty that does not insert itself into the streetscape of U Street. The view along the alley is a less important one because of its length, but also because the alley itself post-dates the era of McGill houses and is out of context with the house. The McGill house at 421 T Street was designed to sit in a landscape, not on an alley.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends the Board find the concept design for a three-story rear addition to 421 T Street NW to be compatible in height and massing with the character of the house and historic district, but that the scale and complexity of roof components must be simplified for the project to achieve compatibility. The project should return to the Board for further review when ready.

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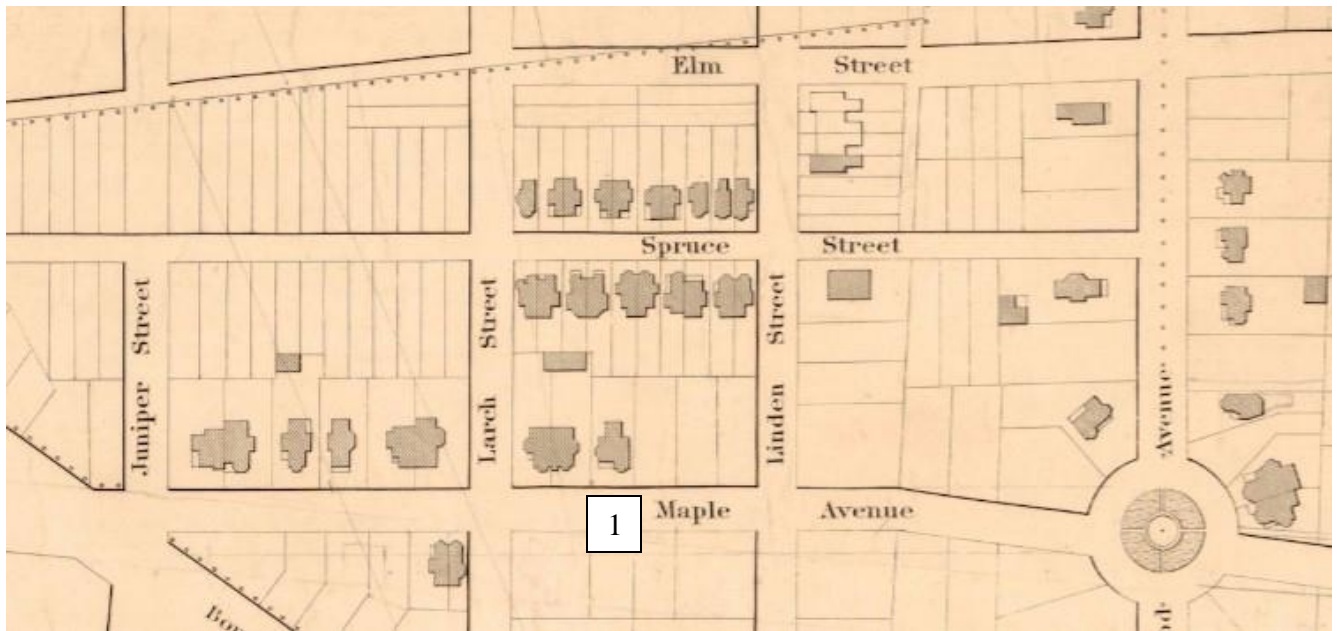


Figure 1. *LeDroit Park* (A. L. Barber & Co., 1880). #1, 421 T Street